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ABSTRACT

The study reported in this paper, conducted during the winter of 1973-74, explored the newshole policies of U.S. daily newspapers in the context of rapid technological and economic changes. A national survey consisted of a structured questionnaire mailed to a stratified, random sample of newspapers selected by circulation size. Analysis of responses from 149 managing editors (46% of those queried) shows that 41% of the newspapers surveyed have newshole policies which set aside a minimum number of column inches for news each day regardless of advertising load; that 91% of the managing editors consider their paper's newshole policy to be adequate; that, however, the majority of managing editors frequently need to negotiate for additional space after the newshole is filled; that the proportion of space set aside for nonadvertising content has changed little in recent years; that those using a fixed minimum system for determining newshole size tend to be larger circulation papers which rank higher on a news potential index than papers using other systems; and that although the fixed minimum is the most popular method for determining newshole size, the number of papers using it has recently decreased. (JM)

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News Allocation Policies of American Daily Newspapers

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A spiralling increase in newsprint costs has caused widespread concern about news allocation policies of American newspapers. Discussion of the need for more efficient use of newsprint as the result of economic pressures has revived the traditional criticism that advertising departments are too influential in determining the amount of news space available to editors.[1]

Media critic Ben Bagdikian expresses this concern when he states: "On almost all papers the advertising department determines total pages to be printed and only after this does news receive its allocation."[2]

This criticism is not new, of course. Twenty years ago journalism educator Ralph Casey worried about "unwarranted encroachments of advertising on needed news space."[3] Casey and Copeland studied the problem of news allocation policy and found that many papers were systematically allocating a minimum number of column inches for news each day, regardless of the amount of advertising.

The present study, conducted during the Winter of 1973-74, explores the newshole policies of U.S. daily newspapers in the context of rapid technological and economic changes.

Method

The national survey, sponsored by the News Research Center of the American Newspaper Publisher's Association, used a mail questionnaire that was sent to a stratified, random sample of newspapers selected by circulation size from the 1973 Editor and Publisher Yearbook. The structured questionnaire, developed in

consultation with managing editors from several midwest newspapers of various sizes,[4] was returned by 46 percent of the managing editors queried. Comparison of known parameters with descriptive data from the resulting sample of 149 managing editors suggests the sample is highly representative.[5]

Characteristics of the Newshole

According to the survey, the typical daily newspaper in America uses slightly less than 45 percent of its space for non-advertising content on the average day, about the same as reported by Casey and Copeland in 1957.[6] There is, however, wide variation. Some papers devote as little as 23 percent to newshole, while others place the figure as high as 73 percent. Sunday papers set aside more for non-advertising content. On the average, Sunday editions split 50-50 between advertising and non-advertising material.

The average newshole on what the managing editors described as a typical weekday is 4,860 column inches. The average Sunday newshole is 8,927, nearly double that of weekday papers. Again, there is wide variation on these measures.

The most common daily newspaper size is 13-29 pages. (See Table 1.) As might be expected, the figures are somewhat higher for Sunday papers, with nearly half of them running more than 70 pages.

A majority of newspapers (61%) use an eight-column format. About 18 percent use a combination of six and eight columns, and about 12 percent have adopted the six-column page. A small minority (6%) use nine columns.[7]

Regardless of circulation or newshole size, the overwhelming majority of editors say local news makes up the largest proportion of non-advertising content that they classify as news. According to the editors' estimates, 75 percent of the news space in the average daily in the sample was devoted to local news.

Financial, state, and international news receive the least amount of space. (See Table 2.)

Most managing editors appear to be satisfied with newshole size for their papers. but more than a quarter complain that it is too small. A few even say it is too large. (See Table 3.)

The editors were asked also how they thought the average reader viewed newshole size. The estimates correspond closely to the editors' own opinions.

An even larger percentage of managing editors think the size of their Sunday newshole is "about right". Again, editors' perceptions of readers' opinions about newshole size closely parallel their own. (See Table 4.)

Methods for Determining Newshole Size

The most widely used method for determining newshole size is the fixed-minimum approach, the allocation of a specified minimum number of column inches for non-advertising content each day. The number of newspapers using the fixed-minimum policy appears to have declined during the last 18 years. Casey and Copeland reported in 1957 that 54 percent of the U.S. dailies used a fixed-minimum system,[8] while the present study places the figure at 41 percent.

Twenty-six percent use a sliding-percentage formula. With this system the number of pages a newspaper has on a given day is determined by the amount of advertising, and the proportion of advertising to non-advertising space varies with the number of pages.

Seven percent use a fixed-percentage formula that does not vary with the number of pages, and 26 percent use a variety of other systems.

Newspapers with a standardized newshole seem to have a greater potential for gathering and publishing news than those using other methods of space allocation. Those with the standardized system score higher on a "news potential index" developed by Wayne A. Danielson and John B. Adams. The index gives a newspaper a score of one or zero for either having or not having the following attributes: an estimated weekday newshole of 2,500 inches or more; an estimated

editorial staff of 75 or more; three or more news services; publication seven days a week; and morning publication. The higher a newspaper's score, the greater its news potential.[9]

The size of the fixed daily minimum used by papers in this study varies widely, but the average is 1,914 column inches per day. Some papers set aside as little as 352 column inches for news, while others go as high as 4,725. (See Table 5.)

When the newshole size exceeds the fixed minimum, 41 percent of the papers use a sliding scale to determine the size. Thirteen percent use a fixed percentage for the excess. The rest use a variety of other systems.

Fifty-eight percent of the managing editors who work for newspapers with a fixed-minimum system say their papers use this method because it guarantees adequate news coverage. Eighteen percent think it provides a well-rounded newspaper while only three percent say it is conducive to better production schedules. Twenty-one percent list a variety of other responses.

The second most common form of newshole determination, used by 26 percent of the newspapers in this sample, is a percentage formula that varies with the number of pages in the newspaper on a particular day. There is a wide variation in the amount of space that papers using this system are able to set aside for non-advertising content. (See Table 6.)

A percentage formula that remains fixed regardless of page size is utilized by seven percent of the papers. These newspapers average 44 percent non-advertising matter, but some carry as little as 25 percent and others as much as 55 percent.

The 26 percent of the newspapers that do not use fixed-minimum, sliding-percentage, or fixed-percentage methods of newshole determination list a variety of other systems. Responses range from using a fixed number of pages for news to using whatever space the managing editor calls for on a particular day. (See Table 7.)

The specific system for determining newshole is not static. Only 19 percent of the editors say the formula is never revised, but only about a third say the formula is revised on a regular basis, ranging from quarterly to once every 2-5 years. Ten percent added notes to the questionnaire saying that the newsprint shortage had prompted revision of the formula.

The process of policy revision assumes a variety of forms, and executives from the news side usually participate. Only 15 percent of the managing editors say news executives are excluded. The publisher and executives from both the advertising and news departments participate in formula revision at 38 percent of the newspapers. The publisher participates at 58 percent. (See Table 8.)

The managing editors who take part in formula revision have varying roles. Twenty-six percent say they actually negotiate for the news department during the deliberations while 30 percent say they participate in an advisory role. Ten percent report making the decision while three percent say they are simply informed about the decision. The other 30 percent fall into the broad category of "other" that represents a myriad of functions.

Regardless of the system used, 68 percent of the editors know the newshole size for their weekday editions at least one day ahead of deadline time, while only 32 percent know less than one day in advance. Editors for Sunday papers have more lead time, however. Forty-three percent know at least one day ahead, and thirty-three percent have at least two days advance notice.

A large majority of the managing editors appear to be satisfied with their paper's method of determining newshole size. Twenty-eight percent call their system highly adequate, 63 percent say it's adequate, and nine percent think it's inadequate.

Only 11 percent say they would prefer another system. Of these, five editors say they want a system that will give them more autonomy over the newshole, and three say they don't have any system but would like one.

Most editors find that they need extra space during the typical month. Ninety-three percent say they negotiate at least once a month for additional space after the size of the newshole has already been determined. Nearly three-quarters of the editors try for extra space between one and four times per month. They are generally successful. (See Table 9.)

When editors need additional space, they negotiate with various combinations of newspaper executives. Only five percent say they make unilaterial decisions about additional space. (See Table 10.)

Editors are equally likely to negotiate extra space for both scheduled events and late-breaking stories when needed and say they are usually successful in their negotiations.

Data about the proximity of stories for which editors request additional space provide few surprises. Sixty-four percent say they are most likely to negotiate a larger newshole for local stories. Only 31 percent say they are equally likely to seek additional space for all types of stories.

Fifty-two percent of the editors say they have the power to authorize additional pages when needed. Of those with such authority, 59 percent use it less than six times a year, while 31 percent use it from 7 to 25 times. Eleven percent say they authorize additional pages about once every two weeks.

Adding pages, however, is only one of the editor's options when additional space is needed. The most frequently-used methods of gaining additional space are displacing other news or squeezing out house ads. As might be predicted, the least-used option is pulling a paid ad. (See Table 11.)

The newsroom, of course, is not alone in needing additional space on occasion. Nearly all of the editors report that their paper's newshole was changed (persumably reduced) during the past year because of advertising department needs. This was almost a weekly occurrence at 19 percent of the newspapers tallied. (See Table 12.)

News Potential Index

The data were analyzed to determine whether newshole policies of papers scoring high on the news potential index differ from those scoring low. As mentioned earlier, papers high on the index are likelier to use a standardized newshole (V=.33).[10] This means papers with a fixed minimum tend to have larger circulation (Tau_c=.55), more staff members (Tau_b=.72), and more pages (V=.45) on a typical weekday than papers without a standardized newshole. Fixed-minimum papers devote significantly more space to advertising during the average month, however, meaning that the proportion of space set aside for news is less than for papers using other newshole formulas.

There are several other differences between newspapers with the fixed minimum and those without. The fixed-minimum papers tend to have more women's news, editorials, and sports, but there are no significant differences between the two groups in the amount of newshole allocated to local, state, national, or international news.

The data also were analyzed to determine whether there were differences between papers with large fixed minimums and those with smaller ones. As might be expected, those with the larger newshole are less likely to want to change their systems of determining newshole size (V=.50). The editors of papers with larger fixed-minimum newshole are more likely to think newshole size is "about right" in the readers' opinion (Tau_c=.27).

Publisher Participation in Newshole Formula Revision

The newspapers were divided into two groups on the basis of whether the publisher was involved in newshole formula revision. One might speculate that the publisher is likely to keep a tight rein on newshole size for economic considerations. In fact, the analysis showed no differences between news allocation policies of those papers with and without publisher involvement. The two groups are nearly

alike in size of newshole, and the amount of newshole space devoted to various categories of news.

Group Owned Vs. Independent

A similar analysis of ownership showed few differences between group-owned and independent newspapers. The newshole size and proportion of paper devoted to news are the same for both. Also, the analysis disclosed no quantitative differences in the the types of news included in the newshole or the method for determining newshole size. The two groups scored about the same on the news potential index.

In fact, the only difference is a tendency for the managing editors of group-owned papers to serve in an advisory capacity or as a negotiator for the news department in discussions about the revision of the newshole formula. As non-group papers, the managing editor is likelier to make the decision himself (V=.36). This is probably the result of a more complex organization with group papers.

The present analysis is consistent with the results of an ownership study by Grotta in which independent and chain newspapers were compared on a number of quantitative factors. Grotta found no differences in newshole size, number of employees or amount of local coverage.[11]

Circulation Size

As mentioned above, larger newspapers are likelier than smaller papers to have fixed-minimum systems (V=.37), and larger papers have larger newsholes (r=.27). Because the larger circulation papers have more advertising, however, the proportion of the paper devoted to news is less for larger newspapers than for smaller ones (r=.57).

Also, larger papers carry a greater proportion of state (r=.42), national (r=.50), international (r=.39), financial (r=.68), and women's news (r=.52), than smaller papers, and they devote more space to editorial material (r=.49).

Although there is no difference between large and small newspapers in frequency of negotiation for a larger newshole, managing editors at smaller newspapers are slightly likelier to be successful in their efforts (Tau_c=.17). When negotiating, editors at smaller papers are more apt to seek additional space for local news, while large-paper editors are likelier to negotiate for all types of news (V=.42). Small-paper editors are more apt to be successful in negotiations for local news, and editors from larger papers are likelier to achieve success with all types of news (V=.47).

Managing editors from small circulation newspapers are more apt than their counterparts from large circulation papers to view the audience as unhappy with newshole size (V=.34). Also, editors of small newspapers are likelier to want to change their system for determining newshole size (V=.32).

Perceived Competition

Although there are few competing daily newspapers in the United States, there is competition from suburban papers and broadcast media. Managing editors were asked whether they perceive themselves as competing with other news-gathering agencies. The study then searched for differences between papers whose managing editors perceive competition and those whose editors do not.

Editors are much likelier to see themselves competing for news with other newspapers than with the broadcast media. (See Table 13.) On the other hand, 63 percent see radio as providing strong or moderate competition for advertisements. (See Table 14.)

Managing editors working for group-owned newspapers are more apt than editors for independent newspapers to see television as providing competition for news (V=.24). Radio is viewed as a more serious competitor by managing editors from small papers than it is by editors from large papers (V=.28). The latter probably results from the fact that radio is often the only competing news-gathering agency in a small town.

Also, managing editors of newspapers with a fixed minimum are likelier than their counterparts to perceive competition for news (V=.24) and advertisements (V=.32) from other newspapers.

Summary and Conclusions

The data from this survey challenge, at least in day-to-day operations, Bagdikian's assertion that the advertising department usually determines newshole size.[12] Forty-one percent of the newspapers surveyed have newshole policies that set aside a minimum number of column inches for news each day regardless of advertising load. Also, editorial executives are clearly excluded from newshole policy revision at only 12 percent of the papers. Most managing editors (91%) say their paper's newshole policy is adequate.

An overwhelming majority of the managing editors, however, say they frequently need additional space for news after the newshole has been filled. Seventy-five percent say they negotiate for additional space between one and four times per month. They normally request the additional space for local news and are successful in negotiations. Fifty-two percent also say they have the power to authorize additional pages when needed.

The proportion of space set aside for non-advertising content in today's typical newspaper (45%) has changed little during recent years. Larger newspapers tend to have a larger newshole in terms of column inches, but the percentage of the paper containing news is smaller than that for smaller circulation papers. Editors say most (75%) of their paper's newshole is allocated to local news.

Those using a fixed-minimum system for determining newshole size tend to be larger-circulation papers that rank higher on a news potential index--the ability to gather and disseminate news--than papers using other systems. Fixed-minimum papers also set aside more space for women's news, editorials, and sports. A majority of the managing editors who work for fixed-minimum papers say the system's

major advantage is that it guarantees adequate news coverage regardless of advertising volume.

Although the fixed minimum is the most popular method for determining newshole size, the number of newspapers using this system has apparently declined in recent years. Unless forced to do so by the increasing cost of newsprint, it appears that there will be little shift in the future. Most managing editors say they are satisfied with newshole policy.

Footnotes

1. Mark Mehler, "Effects of Tight Newsprint being Felt by Some Papers," Editor and Publisher (August 11, 1973) pp. 12-13. See also: Robert S. Chuck, "Ways to Conserve Newsprint an ANPA Survey," Newspaper Production (May 1974), pp. 38-40.

2. Ben H. Bagdikian, The Information Machines (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 90.

3. Ralph D. Casey and Thomas H. Copeland Jr., "Current 'News Hole' policies of Daily Newspapers: A Survey," Journalism Quarterly, 34:175-186, (1957). See also: Alan S. Donnahoe, "Space Control by Newspapers: An Analysis and a Plan," Journalism Quarterly 33:278-286 (Summer 1956); and Ben H. Bagdikian, "Fat newspapers and thin coverage," Columbia Journalism Review Vol. 12, No. 3 (Sept/Oct. 1973) pp. 15-20.

4. We wish to thank George Gill of the Louisville Courier-Journal, Stu Huffman of the Columbus (Ind.) Republic, Steve Hofer of the Bloomington Herald-Telephone, Jack Backer of the Indiana Daily Student, and Dr. Galen Rarick of the News Research Center for their help in development of the questionnaire.

5. For example, average weekday circulation from data in the 1973 Editor and Publisher Yearbook is 49, 378, while the average for this sample is 50, 781. Also, data from the Yearbook for the proportion of newspapers in various circulation categories correspond closely to those for this study, as do the figures for the proportion of morning and evening newspapers. The statistical results from this study are 95 percent certain to be accurate within six percentage points.

6. Casey and Copeland, op. cit., p. 176.

7. All percentages reported in this study are based on the total number of responses to each question.

8. Casey and Copeland, op. cit., p. 178.

9. Wayne A. Danielson and John B. Adams, "Completeness of Press Coverage of the 1960 Campaign," Journalism Quarterly 38:441-452 (Autumn 1961).

10. $p < .05$ for all measures of association reported. Cramer's V was used for nominal data, and Kendall's Tau_c was used for ordinal data.

11. Gerald L. Grotta, "Consolidation of Newspapers: What Happens to the Consumer?," Journalism Quarterly 48:245-250 (Summer 1971).

12. Bagdikian, loc. cit.

Table 1.

Typical Newspaper Page Size

Number of Pages	Percentage of Newspapers	
	Weekday	Sunday
12 or fewer	19	
13-29	37	15
30-49	30	13
50-69	9	23
70 or more	4	48
Total	99[a]	99[a]

[a]The table does not add up to 100 percent because of rounding.

Table 2.

Estimated News Space Devoted to Various News Categories[a]

Type of News	Percentage of News Space
Local	75
Sports	6
National	4
Women's	4
International	3
Editorial	3
State	3
Financial	2
Total	100

[a]Managing editors estimated the number of column inches devoted to each category on a typical day. The percentages are based on the total for these categories.

Table 3

Managing Editors' Opinions and Perceptions of Readers' Opinions About Newspaper Size on a Typical Weekday.

Size of Newspaper	Editors' Opinions		Editors' Perceptions of Readers' Opinions	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Much too small	6	4	5	4
Too small	37	26	34	24
About right	95	66	93	65
Too big	4	3	8	6
Much too big	1	1	2	1
Total	143	100	142	100

Table 4

Managing Editors' Opinions and Perceptions of Readers' Opinions About Newspaper Size on a Typical Sunday

Size of Newspaper	Editors' Opinions		Editors' Perceptions of Readers' Opinions	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Much too small	1	2	1	2
Too small	10	19	10	19
About right	39	75	36	68
Too big	2	4	5	9
Much too big	0	0	1	2
Total	52	100	53	100

Table 5

Newshole Size of Fixed-Minimum Newspapers

Column Inches	Number of Newspapers	Percentage of Newspapers
Below 600	4	7
601 - 900	3	5
901 - 1200	7	12
1201 - 1500	3	5
1501 - 1800	11	19
1801 - 2100	8	13
2101 - 2400	10	17
Above 2400	13	22
Total	59	100

Table 6

Newshole Capacity of Sliding-Scale Newspapers[a]

Percentage of Space Devoted to Non-Advertising Matter	Percentage of Newspapers	
	Largest Newshole	Smallest Newshole
Below 29	15	11
30-34	11	19
35-39	5	5
40-44	11	8
45-49	11	3
50-54	13	14
55-59	3	8
60-64	18	13
Over 64	13	19
Total	100	100
	(N=38)	(N=37)

[a]Example of how to read the table: The figures in the top row mean that 15 percent of the newspapers using a sliding scale for determination of newshole size would not produce a newspaper that contained more than 29 percent news, while 89 percent (100-11) would not produce a newspaper that contained less than 29 percent news.

Table 7

Additional Methods for Determining Newshole Size[a]

Methods of Determination	Number of Newspapers
Minimum news needs are always met.	8
Whatever is left after ads are in.	6
Fixed minimum number of pages used.	6
System of page size based on ad needs .	5
Cooperation between ad and news dept.	3
Managing editor calls for what's needed.	2

[a]Managing editors of newspapers that did not use a fixed minimum or percentage formula for determining newshole size were asked to explain their systems.

Table 8

Participants in Newshole
Formula Revision

Participants	Number of Newspapers	Percentage of Newspapers
Publisher and news and advertising executives	38	31
General manager and some combination of executives	28	23
Editor and some combination of executives excluding general manager and/or publisher	17	14
Publisher and news executives	14	11
Publisher only	8	7
Publisher and combination of executives including news personnel	7	6
Publisher and combination of executives excluding news personnel	4	3
Editor only	3	2
General manager only	3	2
Total	122	99[a]

[a]Percentages do not total 100 because of rounding.

Table 9

Managing Editors' Negotiations
for Additional Space

Frequency of Negotiation During Average Month of 1973-74	Negotiations	Successful Negotiations
	Percentage	Percentage
Less than once	7	7
1-2	39	44[a]
3-4	33	31
5-6	15	13
7 or more	7	6
Total	101[b]	101[b]
	(N=110)	(N=101)

[a]The table seems to indicate that 44 percent of the editors were successful in negotiations for extra space once or twice a month even though only 39 percent negotiated with that frequency. What this indicates, however, is that some editors who requested space more frequently were successful only once or twice a month.

[b]Percentages do not total 100 because of rounding.

Table 10

Persons with Whom Managing Editors
Negotiate for Larger Newshole

Persons or Combination of Persons	Number of Editors	Percentage of Editors
Business manager or advertising department executive	22	18
Combination of publisher and other executives	19	16
Production manager or other production personnel	18	15
Publisher	17	14
Combination of General manager and other executives excluding publisher	14	12
General manager	12	10
No negotiation -- managing editor makes decision	6	5
Editor	4	3
Other	9	7
Total	121	100

Table 11

Editors' Use of Options for Handling Late-breaking Stories After the Newshole is Filled[a]

Editors' Options	Percentage of Editors Using Options			
	Frequency of use			
	Never	1-15	16-25	More than 25
Paid ad pulled (N=73)	70	26	1	1
House as pulled (N=94)	4	57	13	26
Other news displaced (N=85)	5	27	37	46
Pages added (N=101)	9	73	8	11
Story used later (N=70)	13	31	10	46

[a]Example of how to read the table: The figure in the upper-left corner means 70 percent of the 73 editors responding to the question did not pull a paid ad in order to obtain additional space for news.

Table 12

Frequency of Newshole Size Changes During 1973-74 as a Result of Advertising Department Needs[a]

Frequency of Newshole Change	Number of Newspapers	Percentage of Newspapers
Never	7	5
1-5	17	13
6-10	27	21
11-15	15	12
16-20	8	6
21-25	11	9
26-51	19	15
More than 51	25	19
Total	129	100

Table 13

Managing Editors' Perceptions of Competition for News from Various Media[a]

Amount of Competition	Percentage of Editors who see Competition from:		
	Radio	Television	Newspapers
Strong	9	16	29
Moderate	30	21	38
Weak	50	45	29
No competition	11	18	5
Total	100 (N=140)	100 (N=140)	101[b] (N=140)

[a]Example of how to read table: The figure in the upper-left corner indicates nine percent of the 140 managing editors responding see strong competition for news from radio.

[b]Percentage does not total 100 because of rounding.

Table 14

Managing Editors' Perceptions of Competition for Advertising from Various Media[a]

Amount of Competition	Percentage of Editors who Perceive Competition From:		
	Radio	Television	Newspapers
Strong	15	16	26
Moderate	48	27	17
Weak	33	34	37
No Competition	4	23	21
Total	100 (N=136)	100 (N=134)	101[b] (N=132)

[a]Example of how to read table: The figure in the upper-left corner indicates 15 percent of the 136 managing editors responding perceive strong competition from radio.

[b]Percentage does not total 100 because of rounding.